



LETTERS TO A LADY,

EMBODIED

A Popular Sketch of the History of Architecture,
AND THE CHARACTERISTICS OF
THE VARIOUS STYLES WHICH HAVE PREVAILED.*

My Dear Scyllah :

I ENDED my last letter at the commencement of the fourth century, when the Emperor Constantine, who had embraced the Christian faith, removed the seat of empire from Rome to Byzantium. Under his rule the followers of the new religion emerged from the caves and crypts to which they had been driven by severe laws, and sought fitting temples wherein to worship God. There were in Rome, as I said, halls built for the administration of justice and as places of assembly for the merchants during winter, called *basilicæ*, and these offered the most convenience for the celebration of their religious rites. In one of the side divisions, or aisles, the male applicants for justice waited, in another the females. At the end next the tribune, and terminating the aisles, there was in some of them a division in a transverse direction for advocates, which simply wanted elongating to make the whole present the form of the cross. The Christian basilica afterwards built in Rome was a repetition of its Pagan predecessor. Constantine was anxious to render his new city equal to Rome, and made extraordinary efforts to effect this. Not merely did he take all the best artificers that were left in the ancient capital, but he carried off marbles, bronzes, and columns, wherewith to construct new edifices. A description of the city, composed about a hundred years after its foundation, enumerates a school of learning, a circus, two theatres, eight public and 153 private baths, fifty-two porticoes, five granaries, eight aqueducts, four halls, fourteen churches, fourteen palaces, and above 4,398 houses distinguished by their size or beauty. As the number and skill of his architects were unequal to the greatness of Constantine's designs, the magistrates of the various provinces were directed to appoint professors, and to induce a number of youths who had received a liberal education to engage in the study of architecture.

Constantinople became the resort of men of skill from all countries. Artists of every kind were invited from various parts, especially from Greece. Constantine raised an enormous number of buildings; but they were built so hastily and with so little care for stability, that in a very short time they required re-erection. Justinian, who ascended the throne of the East in 527, renewed such of his buildings as were left, and with increased splendour. Sta. Sophia, first built by Constantine, and destroyed by fire, was rebuilt by Justinian so magnificently, that he was able to exclaim when he had completed it (thirty-sixth year of his reign), "I have vanquished thee, O Solomon!" Gibbon thinks that the cost of it must have been more than a million sterling.

Anthemius of Thrales and Isidorus of Miletus were the architects of Sta. Sophia. Justinian employed more than 500 architects to repair buildings and erect new ones. Sta. Sophia, as erected by Justinian, was the great type of the second period of Byzantine architecture, and on this was founded all the subsequent architecture of the Eastern world.

Byzantine art necessarily influenced many structures erected in Italy, too. The octagon church of St. Vital, in Ravenna, is an example of early Byzantine art, and St. Mark's at Venice exhibits a strong Byzantine influence.

Some of the features of Byzantine architecture (induced by the use of columns and materials ready to their hands, desire to avoid the appearance of a heathen temple, and increased skill in the construction of vaults) were semi-circular arcades one over the other, semi-circular openings containing within them two or more smaller arches, and the use of Cupolas, the main offspring, indeed, of the style. The body of the churches was covered in many cases by a dome carried on four piers or pillars placed in the centre of the area, so as to form a cross of equal arms, since called the Greek cross. In the Latin cross (the plan of most of our own cathedrals) the transept or transverse arms are shorter than the longitudinal arms—the western arm longer than the eastern. The large flat surfaces which the walls presented led to the use of mosaics, and painted and gilded decorations, in the production of which the Greeks of the lower empire so excelled that some mosaic work was universally termed *opus Græcum*. They maintained their superiority in this respect for several centuries. In the art of fresco-painting and glass-staining they attained considerable skill. Many of their buildings thus decorated, the walls coated with marbles and the cupolas plated with gold, must have presented a dazzling appearance.

Eusebius, in his Life of Constantine, describes many of the buildings erected by him, and shows that they were magnificently adorned. Of the Church of the Apostles, for example, he says (Book III.), that when he had carried the whole of this temple to an immense height, he rendered it splendid with various kinds of stone, encrusting it from the base, even to the roof, with marble. The roof was delicately ornamented and gilt, and the whole building, as a protection against the weather, was covered with brass, which, again, being overlaid with gold, was so resplendent, that it dazzled the eyes of spectators afar off by the reflection of the sun's rays.

To Byzantium, as I have said, we owe the cupola, and, as Hope remarks, so much does this feature prevail in the old churches, both in Italy and in Germany, that the Latin word *domus*, or house, applied to that of worship,

par excellence, and retained alike in the Italian appellation of *duomo*, and the German one of *dom*, given to the cathedral of each city, has, in French and English, been transferred and restricted to, and become synonymous with that peculiar part thereof more properly called *cupola*.

Mohammedan and Moorish architecture grew out of that of Byzantium; so also the architecture of Russia: its influence, indeed, as you will find, was felt everywhere. For the second time, then, as you see, the Greeks obtained dominion over architecture; and from them again were the first lessons in it given to the world.

I am afraid you will think all this very prosy, but if you will take the trouble to master this period, which forms the turning-point between ancient and modern history, you will find it has a value.

To return for a short time to the ancient capital. Long before the reign of Justinian—namely, in the fourth century—Rome was besieged several times, and ravaged by the Goths, and numberless fine specimens of ancient art were destroyed. When these energetic people, however, obtained possession of Italy, their chiefs showed considerable anxiety to protect rather than injure, and sought by such means as were in their power to advance the arts.

Theodoric, king of the Ostrogoths, who ascended the throne of the western empire in 493, had been educated in Constantinople, and was impressed with the importance of architecture. He called to Rome Greek architects, and, with his minister Cassiodorus, insisted on the preservation of ancient buildings, and aided in the erection of new. At his death, however, which happened after a prosperous reign of thirty-three years, darkness came over Rome, and the arts remained for many years extinct. It must not be supposed that the architecture we call Gothic was invented by these Goths. They seem simply to have imitated, at first unskillfully, what was before them. Though the manner of building then in use was actually the mode out of which grew Pointed Architecture, this owed nothing to the Goths. The term "Gothic" was applied to Pointed architecture in much later times by Sir Henry Wotton, and then by Evelyn, simply as an epithet of opprobrium to distinguish it from the works of the classic period.

In the year 553 Rome was re-united to the Eastern Empire. Soon afterwards Italy was overrun by the Lombards, a rude people, who, however, soon attained a considerable degree of civilisation, and influenced greatly both commerce and art.

The Lombards had no architecture of their own, but they employed the artists of Constantinople, and their buildings were after the Roman manner (*more Romano*),—Romanesque, as it is termed. The Roman basilica, and the churches of Byzantium, both assisted to produce the style; and the churches of the Rhine are its noblest results. Semi-circular arches, columns of any height according to the necessity, without reference to the diameter, as in classic times, and vaulted ceilings, are amongst the characteristics of the style. They covered the façades of some of their buildings with a number of small arcades, rising one over the other, and enriched them with a profusion of sculptured ornament: the windows were mostly small round-headed openings, and their doorways were richly adorned with shafts at the sides, and sculpture in the semi-circular arches over the square-headed doorway. They adopted the long nave and apses of the Basilica and the dome of the Byzantines; and we have to thank them for one very important new feature, and that is the development of the *bell-tower* or *steeple*, notwithstanding that towers probably first arose in Constantinople.

This style endured long in Italy, from the invasion of the Lombards to the 13th century, and was variously modified, but I need not trouble you with more minute particulars.

The cathedral at Pisa, which you remember very well, was commenced in 1063 or 1064, was finished in 1113, and became the type for many other churches. The west front presents tiers of small arcades, one above the other. It is

* No. X. See also pp. 100, 133, 164, 166, 224, 260, 262, 294, and 364.